THE AMERICAN NEW WOMAN AND HER INFLUENCE ON THE DAUGHTERS OF THE EMPIRE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA IN THE DAILY PRESS (1880-1895)

francoise LE JEUNE, Pr

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, the small colony of Vancouver Island in the province of British Columbia stood out from the rest of Canada and the rest of the British colonies for reasons of race, class and gender. First, it was a late creation among the series of colonies launched by the Colonial Office in the nineteenth century as it was open for settlement in 1849 only. Thus it was a well-devised creation which had learnt from the success and failure of other British settlements overseas. It was designed for white British settlers, and preferably reserved to middle-class families as it was said that British middle-class wives and mothers had an important part to play in the building of colonies. They would preserve the British spirit and identity in this small British island in the Pacific North-West, secluded beyond the Rocky Mountains. The British middle class counted many penniless and disillusioned families in these mid-Victorian years. Hence many young couples found their way to the 'last jewel of the Crown'—as Victoria was advertised then—in the 1850s and 1860s. They came with their bourgeois dream, that of social and financial success in a British colony under the British flag. Most of the middle-class fathers secured a position in the colonial administration in the capital city of Victoria as civil servants.

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The small colony prospered over the years and many of the once-struggling middle-class colonists made it to the higher political sphere of the colonial administration and society, while their wives were actively participating in the maintenance of their colonial home, the education of the children, and networking for the promotion of their husbands. They were also 'making do' with no maids, on a small civil servant's pension. But financial and social success eventually crowned their team effort in the late 1870s. As a consequence, most of these gentlewomen developed a strong sense of colonial duty and imperial sacrifice pairing their own dire years of hardship with the slow-growing prosperity of the budding colony and thanking themselves and their husbands for their effort when prosperous years transformed Victoria into a true 'jewel of the Crown'. While their husbands held the highest positions in the small colonial world of British Columbia, middle-class housewives called themselves the Daughters of the Empire in reference to a white Anglo-Saxon Canadian movement founded in Ontario at the end of the 1880s—the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. This very private club was reserved to British middle-class and upper-class women who, having emigrated to Canada in the early colonial years, believed in their imperial mission and sustained a strong attachment to the mother country. Chapters (or 'branches') were created in many urban centres all over Canada, including Victoria in 1887.

The connection between British Columbia and the mother country was even stronger as the province did not join the Canadian Confederacy before 1871.
Separated from the rest of Canada by the Rockies, the British families cherished their connection with Britain in which they found their political, social and moral inspiration in the letters from home or in the press via clippings from the British press sent by friends or in British syndicated columns published in their local newspapers. Many middle-class colonists even received The London Times, which was one month old by the time the newspapers were shipped to Canada. To preserve this special relationship between their ‘home’ and their new home in Canada, the young generation of British Canadians—girls and boys born in Victoria in the 1860s and 1870s—often travelled to the mother country in their late teens in order to meet their British families and to be exposed to the mother culture and civilization. The trip to the 'Old World', as these young women tended to see it, was regarded as formative by the older generation and had to be accomplished prior to their getting married.

The purpose of the research described in this paper was to study British Columbian newspapers from 1880 to 1895 in order to understand what the British 'matrons', who came as pioneer gentlewomen, and their young Canadian-born daughters would read on the question of the New Woman. At a time when women in Britain were petitioning Parliament for the right to vote, British Columbian women over 21 were granted the provincial franchise: in 1917, before anyone else in Canada. If the connection with the mother country was still as strong as one might be led to believe, how did they manage quietly to obtain the franchise before their British cousins? I thought the answer might have been in the dailies as the isolation of the small colony was bridged by the reading of papers bringing
news from the Old and New worlds. What information on the progress of the woman's cause were they given to read in Victoria which might explain the absence of defiance on the part of provincial MPs when the suffrage question was discussed in Parliament? In fact, I found that the largest circulating newspaper in the province, The Daily Colonist, had inadvertently (?)—and for several years—exposed its women readers to an on-going debate about the virtues of the traditional Victorian woman and the New Woman. In fact, we will see that in this small colony whose isolation led its settlers to read papers avidly, middle-class female readers and their male companions had been influenced by the more advanced American views on the New Woman which came to their doorstep via syndicated columns from New York.

In 1880, Victoria, the provincial capital of British Columbia where the most educated middle-class readership lived, counted two important daily newspapers, the Victoria Daily Times and the oldest one, the Victoria Daily Colonist, formerly called the British Colonist. The papers contained between six to ten pages, depending on the amount of information or advertisement they carried. In 1882, two pages were added for the purpose of advertisement and on Fridays a part of these two pages was dedicated to women's issues. For this article, I chose to focus on one of the dailies only, the Victoria Daily (British) Colonist, with its large circulation, as it seemed the most representative of the first generation of white middle-class readers with its conservative approach to politics and its affection for the mother country, even though the term British had been dropped from the title by 1871.
A small section at the end of the newspaper had been devoted quite irregularly to women’s interests from 1878 onwards. However, besides some articles on French and English fashion and anecdotes on life in London circles published in the early years of the woman's page, and three articles from the British press on the question of woman’s suffrage as early as 1869, it is difficult to describe the page as a regular feature. In the 1880s and 1890s the whole section began to be composed essentially of syndicated columns from the American Associated Press.

It is in this space opened up for women that surprisingly I discovered that between 1890 and 1897 *The Daily (British) Colonist* regularly published the syndicated contribution of a New York journalist, Eliza Archard Conner. From 1890 onwards, while IN Britain the franchise for women was once again rejected and while the British press was fighting over the 'sex debate' (see Laurel Brake’s article in this collection), Eliza Conner, on a weekly basis, was introducing the world of the American New Woman to the British Columbian daughters of the Empire. Though she was writing in a separate journalistic 'sphere', the women's page, normally 'reserved' to woman-related topics, Conner used it as a forum in which she reported every week on the progress of the feminist cause in America. Besides, she wrote in a new personal, high-flown style typical of new journalism and/or female militants.

However difficult it is to assess the influence on the daughters of the empire of a repeated exposure to this New Woman's writing, my research will analyse a very special issue of *The Daily Colonist*, published by the female readers themselves.
on 28 May 1895. No less than 18 women, from the older and younger generations, contributed to this special edition called 'Place aux Dames'—'Make room for the ladies'—which will provide us with a sample of reactions to the question of the New Woman after the Colonist's readers had been exposed to 'her' propaganda for five years.

The Daily Colonist and the Woman's Page

In the 1880s, like most North American newspapers, The Daily Colonist needed advertisements to support itself and to keep up the standard of its higher journalism pages. It is quite noticeable that the creation of woman's pages corresponded with the rise of mass advertising. Indeed papers appealed to their female readers by providing them with some cheap syndicated columns to read, hoping that they would spend some time reading the advertisement pages too (see Ingrid Sharp’s contribution to this volume). Illustrations became more abundant and therefore pages presenting fashion illustrations and do-it-yourself curios for women found their place at the end of the newspapers in the advertisement pages, or in the woman's page or the 'Woman’s World' (as the Daily Colonist named it), which took up two or three columns. It must have seemed a convenient location for the editor as it came right after the more serious local news and right beside the one or two pages of advertisements. Conveniently, in the lay-out of these pages, advertising was next or in between these short paragraphs or columns devoted to women. It was designed to attract women shoppers offering at first
sentimental or amusing readings, before taking advantage of the emotion created by their reading experience, with visual incentives calculated to prompt them to make spontaneous purchases.

The woman's page offered women journalists a narrow access to the world of journalism. Since they were barred from higher journalism, North American editors first confined them to the end of the papers, to the ‘woman’s corner’ in which they could express their writing ambitions in reports on household-related news and other domestic interests. Confined to columns at the end of local newspapers, women gradually developed a style and often expressed their conventional or unconventional ideas before moving on to other sections of the paper at the turn of the century. Two famous Canadian female journalists, Kit Carson and Sarah Janet Duncan, graduated from this woman's sphere of the written word to higher journalism in the 1910s. The latter wrote a column for the famous Toronto quality-paper, *The Globe and Mail*, under the alias Garth Grafton. For several years, next to the advertisement pages, Sarah Duncan entertained Toronto's upper middle-class women with her weekly chronicle, in which she often expressed her own feminist views on the world, regularly mocking in humoristic overtones the narrow-minded Victorian upper-class matrons she wrote for. She gradually graduated to the position of editor of the woman's page. The general editor trusted her with the selection of the syndicated columns which she often chose for their interesting content for the advance of the woman's cause.
Thus as early as 1878, *Daily Colonist*'s readers were provided with information on the latest interests of the female reader with the creation of an almost weekly 'woman’s page'. When it eventually became a regular weekly page two years later, the entire section was composed of a collection of syndicated articles from the American Associated Press. The columns were simply juxtaposed to fill up the page connected only by loose female-related interests. Readers must have had the impression that the page or half-page was completed with bits and pieces assembled hastily by an editor who did not seem to care much about the content of the page. This was quite a current practice among editors of provincial newspapers, in Ontario or Quebec, for instance, editors resorted to syndicated columns when lacking inspiration to fill up the page or when refusing to hire a woman columnist or a woman editor for the woman's page. However we shall see that in the case of the editor of *The Daily Colonist*, his lack of interest for the woman's page and for women's reading led him to offer a seditious column that he must have dismissed as 'silly stuff' and neglected to read himself.

However, editorial control was nevertheless quite tight as the editor must have boasted to the women editors of the 'Place aux Dames' special edition of 28 May 1895. Indeed, the fact that the one-day female editors of the women's issue had to justify their editorial regulations and proceeding in a separate paragraph underlined the journalistic ethics of the regular editor of *The Daily Colonist*:

In ordinary editions of the paper the articles published are in harmony with one another and with the professed opinions of the editor. But as in this
edition an effort has been made in quite an opposite direction, it was deemed expedient to request that the contributors sign their articles. The writers, therefore, are responsible only for the opinions above their own signature.

(The Daily Colonist, 28 May 1895)

Indeed if each article had to pass the editor's muster, it is surprising that he would have endorsed subversive articles written by New Women, radical in tone and action. His ethics must have only applied to the pages devoted to high journalism. [IS IT OKAY TO REPLACE THIS SENTENCE WITH THE FOLLOWING: ‘In providing a space for views which clashed with his own but which were likely to attract readership attention and therefore further sales, he may have been activated by similar motives as those described by Laurel Brake in relation to British male editors.’]

In short, in the 1880s, the American Associated Press seemed to have become a handy and cheap source of some syndicated columns destined for a female readership into which editors could tap when looking for entertaining pieces which might suit the taste of their female readers—a second-hand readership for editors. Among the columnists working for the American Associated Press, some signatures recurred in the woman's page of many provincial newspapers in Canada; Mrs Frank Leslie was one of them. In The Daily Colonist for instance her regular contributions on the woman's world of fashion, marriage and domestic happiness, along with some traditional illustrations, alternated with Eliza Archard
Conner's feminist column. At times even, both columns featured next to each other on the same half-page. However, from 1890 onwards Conner contributed weekly and unfolded the New Woman’s progress in the world in facts and figures in a long column called 'Woman’s world in paragraphs'. The paragraphs were thought-provoking and very seditious compared to Mrs Frank Leslie's prim and proper column which was published once or twice a month only.

**The Woman’s World: The New Woman versus 'Silly Stuff'**

What we are going to see in the pages of the woman’s corner is an on-going debate between two extreme views, the radical feminist one defended by Conner and the anti-New Woman position held by other female contributors like Mrs Leslie. At no stage over those years, the period between 1890 and 1895, did British Columbian women express themselves on the woman's cause in the paper. However, over this five-year period, women in British Columbia, at least those reading the paper, had been weekly exposed to the pamphlets of a committed New Woman and to her questioning of woman's place in her community and in society at large. She wrote some bitter commentaries on the Victorian American society that confined women to the private sphere and instead advocated the need for a woman to nurture her self and her body, while dedicating her time to work and to civic activity, as well as to her intellectual accomplishment through higher education. The result of such a subversive reading can be seen in the May 1895 Women’s Edition of The Daily Colonist in which regular male and female readers were able to measure the impact of such articles on the young generation of
British colonists, possibly regretting that such an influential propaganda might have escaped the careful screening of the editor and the male readers before that.

At least, the influence of the New Woman’s position is quite noticeable on the other contributors in this weekly debate on the question of woman’s rights and woman’s place in the world, even if these columns were not answering each other directly in *The Daily Colonist*. Over these five years we can notice a gradual opening of the mind of the more 'conservative' or traditional women writers' viewpoints (whose position was somehow similar to the daughters of the Empire in 1890) on the woman’s cause or rights, as if they were slightly conquered by the novelty of the New Woman’s world. Mrs Frank Leslie, for instance, gradually abandoned her conservative stand on the duties of women in the household to which she professed in her early columns, to discuss the phenomenon of the new mother or the new wife, and the new daughter whom she associated with the 'modern girl'. The vocabulary used in American anti-feminist columns in the 1890s heralds the gradual acceptance or the coming to age of 'the woman of today', whom Mrs Leslie describes as a 'woman of thought and actions' in a column published on 30 May 1894, abandoning expressions such as the 'fair sex', the 'weaker sex' or the 'softer sex', or 'wives and mothers' which dotted her columns in the 1880s. However, she never abandoned her harsh criticism of the New Woman's radical demands. While heralding some kind of New Girl’s age, she also insisted that she was not ready to make other concessions to what she called the emancipation of the daughters, who might rapidly turn into New Women and ask for the franchise which, to her, was a 'white elephant':
Do not suppose that I am advocating the complete emancipation of young girls from parental control. No, for I think nothing more disagreeable than the independent and almost insulting tone adopted in these days by a good many girls toward their fathers and mothers. Let girls, as they grow older, show their right to freedom by their moderation and wisdom in using it.

(The Daily Colonist, 26 January 1894)

As earlier studies have shown, the term New Woman was coined by Sarah Grand and Ouida for the first time in 1894. In our traditional columns, the word is never actually used, but several metaphors in 1894 point to the New Woman: 'fair feminine anarchists' (30 May), 'the woman emancipator', 'the emancipated woman' (27 March), 'these revoltees' (12 October), 'the self torturing feminine sophist' (30 May), 'the wild woman' (22 September), and in one column the woman contributor quoted the British expression 'the revolt of the daughters' (30 May).

The definition of the 'enemy' had evolved from the threatening old maid or blue-stockings to the feminist activist and the anarchist woman writer. Most of the expressions are taken from Mrs Frank Leslie's exceptionally long column 'Mrs Frank Leslie on the case of her versus him' published on 30 May 1894, in which she attacked the latest publications by New Women writers. The 'fair feminine anarchists' were Karen Blixen or Sarah Grand whom she accused of claiming their sexual freedom and 'teaching, writing articles for newspapers, attending socialist meetings, and taking part in political discussion.' She criticized their lack
of literary art and the prejudiced mind of such 'femmes incomprises'. She concluded that they were affected by hysteria, describing them as examples of the 'literary shrew' and 'preposterously nervous creature'.

As the juxtaposition of the articles of the woman's page was not an editorial choice, the adoption of a more progressive approach on the part of the 'traditional' female contributors must have come from a larger influence found in the press, in New York, where Eliza Conner and Mrs Leslie were writing from. In other words, women readers in British Columbia witnessed the softening of Mrs Leslie's ideas and positions on the place of women in society over the years in their daily. There she echoed the acceptance of the concept of the 'modern girl' by the Victorian society in America and she was possibly heard by some 'matrons' in Victoria. The Daily Colonist's women readers benefited from the results of a confrontation of viewpoints via the press which happened in the American metropolis, a large cultural, intellectual and social centre where fashion and ideas developed and were promoted or rejected overnight. What is striking, however, is the fact that at the same time as the New Woman debate was raging in the press in New York, it also took place in the remotest corner of the British Empire, in Victoria, on the last page of a conservative daily under the very nose of The Daily Colonist's editor and before the eyes of its second-hand readers, young British Canadian women.

Several questions remain unanswered. For instance, I did not find out who Eliza Archard Conner was and to which other papers she contributed in the States. I did not find any of her articles in other Canadian newspapers. From her weekly
column her readers gathered that she was a free-lance writer living in New York where she was well connected with other female journalists and progressive newspaper editors. She seems to have been an independent woman—an 'unattached woman', to paraphrase Mrs Frank Leslie writing on 26 May 1894. From her freedom of tone it is clear that she was very independent-minded and that she did not seem to fear any editor or readers’ comments. She spoke her mind and she never concealed her feminist feelings from her readers. Far from it, she repeatedly affirmed her New Woman viewpoint and way of life, attacking men and 'matrons' alike with terse comments.

Conner took a particular strong stand on several aspects of the female cause, transforming her rather long column into seditious pamphlets or scolding pieces as she targeted men's world and matrons' domestic sphere alike. Under the main title 'Woman's World in paragraphs', she regularly attacked the traditional virtues of the confined woman's world which The Colonist's editor must have thought she was extolling week after week. Using the first person singular and a very personal tone—like many 'new journalists' of the time who wanted to add some wit and life to their column—she commented on the progress of women in 'Man's World' under the subtitle 'Reports on the Progress for Women'. Then in a few short paragraphs she gave some facts and figures illustrating the 'progress of the cause'. At times, her column reads like a war bulletin announcing the progress of the allied forces beyond the enemy’s lines. For instance, reporting on women in the professions every week, she quotes the number of women involved in such and such trade ('There are about 200 women lawyers in this country...' 28 February
1892), praising them by their own name, like dutiful soldiers, when they joined an advanced position for women in the traditional male-controlled institutions or in typical male occupations. But she also vigorously attacked women who had joined the professions but did not want to fight for equal pay. She held them responsible for letting women lag behind men and for contributing to the clichés about women taking up men’s positions, as is illustrated in this 'Report on the Progress for Women' of 21 February 1892:

Just as long as women will put up with it [lower salaries for the same position] they are not worth a cut more. Woman or man who will endure injustice and ill treatment deserves all he or she get and more too. They cheapen and degrade the services of their whole sex and strengthen that vile old superstition that a woman’s work is less valuable.

(The Daily Colonist, 21 February 1892)

She also encouraged women to enter universities by quoting examples of successful and persevering female individuals in law schools or medical schools across America and sometimes Canada, which she found more progressive than the United States—at least on that chapter. She criticized big universities—quoting their names—for being too narrow-minded or conservative on the subject of women’s higher education. She invariably insisted that every single female student's victory and every step taken into man’s world was a victory for all the women in the world. Her activism also became blatant when she encouraged women to enrol massively in universities by stating that their admission could not
be turned down unless universities introduced a special regulation against women which would have caused bad publicity for them.

Similarly, she insisted on the importance of self-education for women who if not exposed to higher education should seek information by themselves about what went on in the world, by reading newspapers, or joining women’s clubs which held regular classes for their female members on politics and social reform. They should therefore prepare themselves for the day when they would receive the right to vote. Here again she quoted some figures on the American states in which women already voted actively. What she called 'woman’s duty' in her column had nothing to do with the motherly intervention of matrons into reform making or in temperance campaign—voting along with their husbands or as they were told. She referred instead to a personal vote granted to active citizens equal within the society in which they lived. Therefore it became necessary to women to acquire as much knowledge as possible in politics in order to become enlightened citizens, superior to all those 'useless men', as she often described the other sex.

Connor underlined the importance of becoming independent before getting married—if some women still wished to do so—insisting on the fact that a woman could easily stand on her own two feet. Hence several of her columns were devoted to the possible investments such as shares that a single woman could make in order to prosper rapidly—with a female partner if necessary—but above all without a male partner. She referred to the entrepreneurial spirit of women with some means, addressing women readers of her own social class. Indeed she
never gave any advice to women whose financial means would have been limited. On rare occasions she praised working-class women’s capacities to create unions and to fight for their own rights better than isolated educated women, who should follow their example and learn from group activism. She tended towards exaggeration when preaching equality between men and women at all costs, even in harsh employments. For instance, on 29 March 1894 she attacked male reformers for limiting the hours of work of female factory workers to eight, whereas they left men’s hours untouched: ‘If a man may work in a factory as long as he and his employer choose, then so may a woman.’ The New Woman she represents—as she spoke for herself and her independent sisters in *The Daily Colonist*—gradually took shape before her readers' eyes and she became a regular companion. The New Woman whom she embodied came from the middle class, had joined a club, was educated and read the paper like most of her female readers in British Columbia.

Women who decided not to marry learned to become self-reliant thanks to Connor’s short, often repeated maxims that women could remember in times when the courage to stand up for themselves might have failed them: 'If you are a woman and have all the rights you want, for heaven’s sake be ashamed to tell it.' (29 March 1894). Or quoting the French philosopher Pascal, she wrote: 'I think, therefore I am' (29 March 1894) and continued: 'A woman remarked the other day "I admire men as a work of art, but I do not fall in love with them"'. On 12 January 1895 Connor wrote: 'The New Woman loves all mankind, but best of all, she loves her own sex.' The female columnist also encouraged her younger female
readers to join female clubs not for charity but for civil work or to look for partners among their own 'sisters'. On 16 January 1894 she even devoted a column to the great experiment of an all female colony, Miss Annette Daisy's colony of women begun in the 1880s, in which women ruled themselves without men. Indeed, she is very disparaging towards men whom she despised to the exception of one or two, who gave a few women the opportunity to enter the professions. She commented with irony and even bitterness on men’s 'advantages' and the way they misused them (especially their right to vote). Last but not least, she underlined the changes in the physical appearance and outlook of the 'woman of nowadays', praising the novelties of regular exercise and the wearing of bloomers or 'trouserettes' for women. On many occasions, as in an article published on 19 April 1894 with the subtitle 'A sign of the time—long skirts must go and the sooner the better', Conner revelled in the shocking irreverence which New Women displayed in New York or Boston as they paraded in their new attire before 'matrons':

Meg Merrilies, the brilliant reporter of the *New York World* lately made a trip from New York to Boston and back wearing the so-called Boston national dress: trouserettes, a short jacket vest, with regulation tie and a long coat [...] Men, women and boys stared at her, but women, poor fools, were the severest critics and talked her over openly and mercilessly. Women do make me mad sometimes.

*(The Daily Colonist, 19 April 1894)*
Conner repeatedly attacked the 'weaker sex' or the 'fair sex', mocking, criticizing, ridiculing traditional women and their so-called domestic virtues. Like many New Women, she held her more conservative 'sisters' responsible for keeping women in subjection and for enjoining them to enter the narrow world of matrimony and financial dependence. As she states on 21 February 1892, 'When a man has made money and bought himself a high official place, his wife, a stupid woman with no more brain than a turkey, sets herself upon a pedestal and sneers at woman suffragists, and professional women.'

She showed neither compassion nor support to 'weaker women' whom she condemned as uneducated, submissive, or too womanly or matronly. For instance, on two occasions she professed that a woman who was repeatedly beaten up by her husband and stayed in the marriage 'deserved to be beaten for her stupidity', until she turned 'black and blue' (21 February 1892). Her tone on these occasions was very harsh, single-minded and entirely subjective. In fact, over the five years preceding the women’s edition of the Daily Colonist, her tone gradually became harsher and more militant. She was clearly using newspapers as a medium to reach women and to advance the woman’s cause, in violent overtones at times, hoping to stir a revolutionary spirit among women. On 13 March 1892 she defined her journalistic mission as follows:

The increasing prominence given to the work of her sex in the weekly newspaper and family journal makes it possible for the woman who lives at the crossroads to keep informed on her sister’s doings all over the
world, and as she reads she thrills in unison with this reaching out of her kind.

(The Daily Colonist, 13 March 1892)

She opposed her high-quality contribution as a real journalist to the witty and light-minded pieces written by female contributors like Mrs Frank Leslie. She dismissed their writings repeatedly, mocking them as 'so-called “woman’s columns” of the average newspaper … such a “silly stuff”' (27 March 1892). However, the brunt was borne by female readers interested in such ‘silly stuff’ instead of a more worldwide knowledge: ‘there must be a demand for such gush and nonsense or it would not be furnished ... The prevalent ignorance of woman on wider and nobler topics is responsible for the present woman’s column of the newspaper.’ (27 March 1892)

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The Daughters of the Empire and the Debate on the New Woman.

Where did British Columbian women stand on the question of the New Woman in 1895? Did they follow Mrs Frank Leslie's more traditional views or were they inspired by Eliza Conner's arguments favouring liberty and full emancipation for women? Did the new generation of British Canadian women born in North America share Conner’s aspirations and her recommendations on 'sisterhood'? Indeed in order to fight for their own rights, 'women could only rely on themselves', wrote Eliza Conner in The Daily Colonist on 22 March 1895.
Defending the importance of collective action and its support, she offered the description of a 'model club' in the state of New York in which women organized themselves and taught each other: 'Best of all, article 8 of the constitution [of the club] declares that no topic, social, political or religious shall be excluded from discussion at the meetings'. (22 March 1895) Hoping to stir some reaction among her young readers, she concluded: 'If only more women had this much courage and liberality, what a happy world this would be.' The special 28 May 1895 issue of the *Daily Colonist*, published by the women of Victoria—members of clubs in the youngest and charitable organizations in the older generation—is a good example of the impact Conner’s columns may have had on her readers. One of the contributors, Agnes Dean Cameron, played a prominent part in the edition of the issue and went on to become a journalist and feminist.

As an introduction to the special edition, a letter was addressed to the regular editor of *The Colonist*—'Place aux Dames'—in which the female editors explained their journalistic intentions. As the contents of this letter confirm, women in Victoria were faithful readers of the daily and that they had been regularly exposed to the progress on the woman’s question in the woman’s page:

A few words are necessary to explain this edition of the *Colonist* and the aims of the women who are responsible for it. They do not put it forth as their ideal of what a paper should be. On the contrary, for daily food, they would much prefer the ordinary edition.

*(The Daily Colonist, 28 May 1895, emphasis in original)*
It was upon the occasion of the first national meeting of the Canadian Council of Women in Toronto on 27 May 1895 that the *Daily Colonist* accepted to devote some pages (18 columns) to the women of British Columbia. Local contributors included Mrs Gordon Grant from the Women Christian Temperance Union and Agnes Dean Cameron, as well as a list of all the women’s associations and clubs in Victoria and a brief description of their activities.

On the question of the possible influence that the five-year long on-going account of Eliza Conner might have had on the women of Victoria, some answers might be found in one article bearing the interesting title ‘A Plea for the New Woman’ (*The Daily Colonist*, 28 May 1895). Here a woman contributor acknowledged the fact that women, even housewives, now chose to devote more time to less tedious tasks inside or outside the home. Among their new interests, she underlined the importance of reading the daily press. This statement reinforces my assumption that the woman’s column must have been regularly read by our British Columbia middle-class readers as they might have followed the advice of Eliza Conner on the need to educate oneself in order to form one's opinion:

The most exemplary housewife nowadays does not sit down to count threads and neatly backstitch the necessary dozens of shirt fronts. Probably she takes up instead the daily newspaper and becomes interested in the government of her country, even perhaps to the extent of forming an opinion about it.
Along the eighteen columns devoted to the woman’s cause, one comes twice across the term 'New Woman' and it is in the definition given of this term that one understands how some British Columbian women envisaged the New Woman’s place in society. Among the one-day contributors to The Colonist, radical and half-progressive viewpoints are represented whereas 'silly stuff' contributors are left out. To illustrate the latter views, the edition includes a column written by Mrs Grant, the leader of the Temperance Union (WCTU) in Victoria. She explains that a larger number of middle-class women now accept the fact that they have a public role to play as mothers and wives and that suffrage is needed in order to do so. On the other hand, the younger generation—represented by Agnes Dean Cameron and the anonymous author of 'A Plea for the New Woman', an unsigned piece—argued that women’s rights and demands were justly founded on the correlation between the coming of a 'Woman’s Age' and the 'fin de siècle'. The grand-daughters of Victoria wanted to be recognized as New Women, but without the 'revoltee' side attached to the word.

This testifies to the progressive perceptions of woman’s role in British Columbia on the part of the old daughters of the Empire when compared with the situation in 1880. Even though the 'matrons' still believed, as they had done fifteen years earlier, that their fate was bound up with married life, they now recognised women’s right to be active outside their homes in lady's associations and reforming societies. Indeed, the local branch of the Council of Women in Victoria
boasted 700 members in 1895, less than a year after its foundation in 1894 by Lady Aberdeen. This represents a large support for the franchise for women compared to 1884, when only the members of the WCTU defended the issue before the Provincial Parliament in British Columbia. However, this was still a far cry from the militant activist demands of the New Woman as represented by Eliza Archard Conner. For instance, when one of the lady journalists discussed the franchise in municipal elections, in a half-progressive column entitled 'Woman's Municipal Vote', she argued that the world had changed for the better for women, who were no longer confined to their domestic duties and home. But at the same time she reminded her readers that the 'highest fulfilment of her womanly nature is wifehood and motherhood', concluding her article by denigrating the radical campaigns raging in the press in favour of the woman’s new rights: 'And so too, in this vexed “Woman’s question” that is being thus agitated today, we need to realize that no true woman seeks to become man’s rival or to usurp his rights or peculiar sphere.' (28 May 1895).

The younger contributors attempted to demonstrate that women in British Columbia were also New Women. In her vibrant 'Plea for the New Woman', a budding female journalist tried to develop a new perception of women in society by looking at the origin of what seemed to be, in British Columbia, a now common exception, acknowledged and accepted by many readers:

So entirely has the status of women been changed to the estimation of the public that the expression ‘New Woman’ has been coined to describe the
latest development ... it may be well to ascertain whether the term is reasonably applied.

(The Daily Colonist, 28 May 1895)

According to the article, the New Woman was in fact as old as Eve, like her seeking 'the knowledge of good and evil'. And it is in this range of values that the column placed the New Woman of today, described as reading the papers, seeking a career in the professions, demanding equal educational and civil rights and refusing to be politically classified along with lunatics, criminals and minors. By calling themselves New Women, the young generation of British colonists presented themselves as 'modern women', as hybrids between the 'modern girl' and the 'New Woman', adopting the progressive demands, yet rejecting what they regarded as revolutionary. The article is not aggressive or bitter, it is a mere statement of facts. In a calm tone and subdued style the author affirms that women in British Columbia were now 'new women', but not quite New Women yet, and that they were accepted as such by society. One gathers that the term as well as the idea of the New Woman must have been discussed in clubs before and that the 'plea' is more a statement than a demand for recognition or acknowledgment. Here the term has lost the shocking connotation or aggressiveness felt by some matrons in New York. The tone of the article has nothing in common with that of the 'revoltees' embodied by Conner, to whom the author appears to refer when she apologizes for some women who had used and abused the press to boast about their progress: 'Before everything, they [the New Women] have devoted themselves to their own improvement and perhaps an apology is necessary for the
unblushing effrontery with which they have from time to time chronicled and emphasized their various triumphs.' (Ibid.) Besides, according to this young female journalist, the British Columbian 'new woman' sought the goodwill and sympathy of men to advance her cause instead of antagonizing them. She conceded that 'The chivalrous instincts of men, to which women owe much in the past, are already ranging many on the side of the New Woman.' (Ibid.) Here she seems to accept the heritage of her pioneering 'parents' who recognized the importance of team effort in their colonial society.

The only true follower of Eliza Conner is to be found in Agnes Dean Cameron, an aspiring journalist born in Victoria in 1871, who adopted a very independent lifestyle and worked in general journalism in the twentieth century. Like Conner, in whom she seems to have found her inspiration, Cameron’s column in 'Place aux Dames' acknowledges women’s progress in the world by quoting facts and figures on the advancement of women in the professions. She also denounced the inferiority of women in society in spite of their intellectual performances and she was the only contributor out of eighteen to take stock in her conclusion of the progress of woman as an individual demanding the recognition of her own civic rights, not as a group working to reform society, but as an enlightened citizen.

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From 1890 to 1895, progress was slowly being made on the woman question in British Columbia. The press was an excellent catalyst for the women's cause and a great medium of campaign for New Woman issues. Eliza Conner's propagandist use of the term 'New Woman' seems to have been successful with her readers as
the phrase, hardly coined by the American press in 1894, was soon adopted by the female editors of the special edition and other traditional women columnists writing in *The Daily Colonist*. However, the popular expression was soon turned into a hybrid concept by some provincial readers who adopted it to qualify their own demands or their own 'predicament'. In 1895, in British Columbia, 'New Woman' became synonymous with 'Modern Woman', an active woman demanding the recognition of her rights as an individual. The expression referred to a more advanced concept than the 'modern girl', well-accepted by matrons like Mrs Frank Leslie.

In British Columbia, then, the New Woman had slowly emerged in the press, in a far corner of local newspapers used as a forum for a weekly debate between American women. It was through the press that the concept was taken up by a mass readership, who transformed its meaning from hateful to popular, from radical to non-militant. This reflected the way women thought about themselves in a semi-public space—the woman’s page of their daily—in which they had for the first time access to freedom of speech. The fact that the term New Woman was so readily adopted by the younger generation of British Columbian women, only a few months after having been coined in American newspapers, confirmed the importance of newspaper reading for the coming of a 'A Woman’s Age' in the twentieth century. The journalist who wrote the 'Plea for the New Woman' stated in the special women's issue: 'Newspapers can be read in the seclusion of the home, and opinions do not necessarily result in actions.' (28 May 1895) If Eliza Conner and her radical views had not yet convinced every woman in British
Columbia in 1895 that they should become pro-active in transforming their fate, she had obviously disturbed and ruffled some of the Colonist’s women readers with her impertinence, her 'effrontery'. But in the meantime she challenged the old traditional ways of Victorian society in which her readers lived. She led women to think on their own and to seek in newspapers, beyond the woman's page, the means and information to educate themselves for better days to come. Besides, her young readers in British Columbia identified with the New Women of North America, which enabled them to sever their connection with the Old World of their mothers and the obsolete 'sex' debate raging in Britain.

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